

1979 DBQ

The French Revolution and The Terror

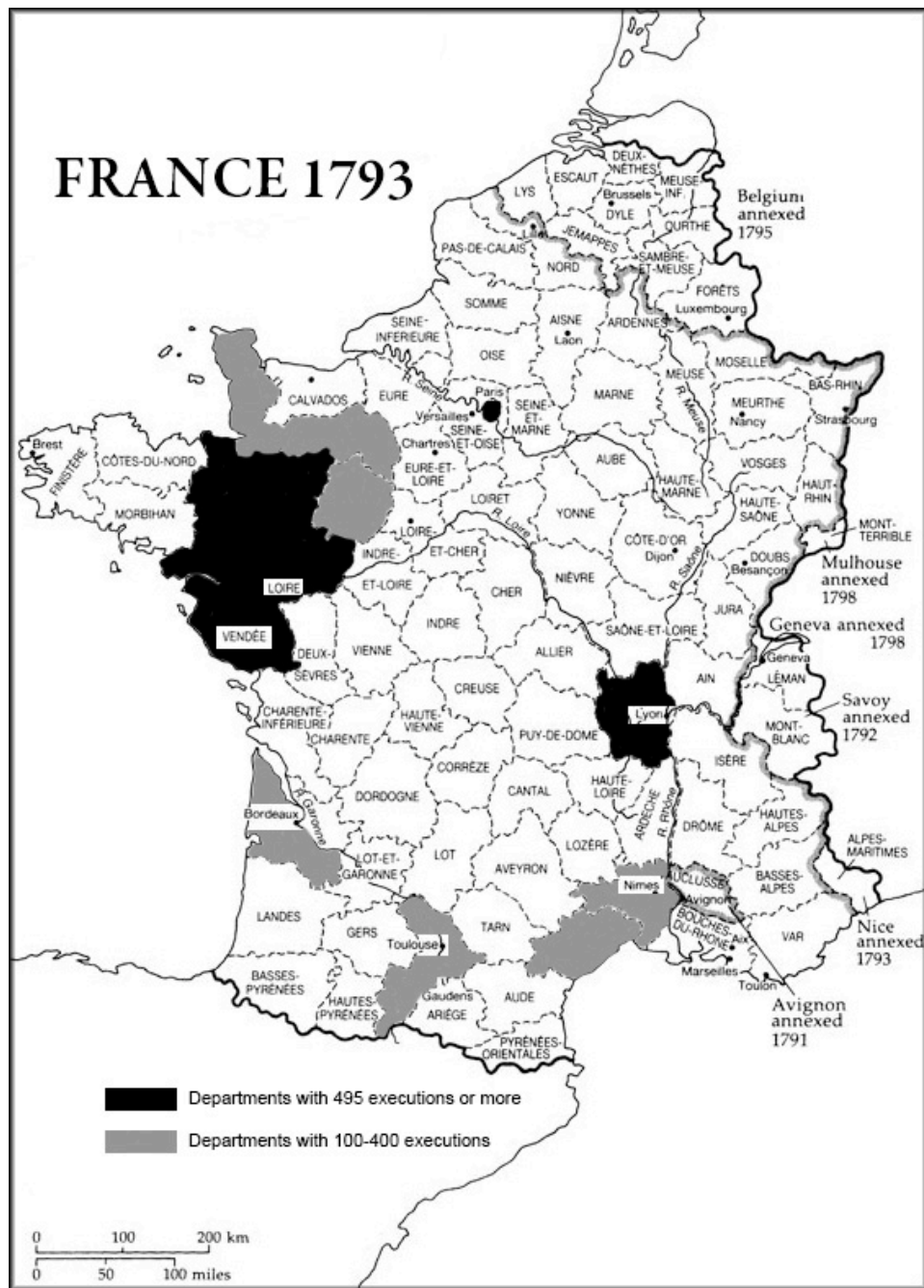
Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying Document Groups A-G. Read and analyze the documents and answer the question.

This question is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. You may refer to historical facts and developments not mentioned in the documents and assess the reliability of the documents as historical sources where relevant to your answer. In constructing your answer DO NOT simply summarize or repeat the contents of the documents.

The Question: Discuss the advantages and the disadvantages of the Terror as an instrument of the French Revolution.

[Historical setting: In the summer of 1793, the radical Jacobins purged their moderate rivals from the National Convention and took over the government of revolutionary France. The country was in disarray. To the north and the east the Prussian and Austrian troops were pushing back the armies of France and threatening to invade the infant republic. The British navy threatened the coasts of France. In western France a war of secession was underway backed by various social groups including the peasantry. In Lyon, another secessionist movement opposed the authority of the radical government in Paris, and there was agitation in several cities in the south and southwest. The country was also in economic crisis. In August and September, the Committee of Public Safety, which governed the Republic, instituted a series of sweeping reforms to deal with the emergency situation. A Revolutionary Tribunal (court) was enlarged, and a law of suspects was passed that legalized local revolutionary committees. Troops were sent to deal with the secessionist areas. When the Terror ended on July, 1794, 14,000 people out of a total population of 25 million had been guillotined, shot, or drowned.]

Document 1



Document 2

Deaths Resulting from The Terror (By Social Groups)								
Area	Nobles	Upper Middle Class	Lower Middle Class	Clergy	Working Class	Peasants	No Status Given	Total
Paris	666 (25%)	746 (28%)	357 (14%)	246 (9%)	493 (19%)	94 (4%)	37 (1%)	2,639 (100%)
France (exclusive of Paris)	412 (4%)	1,218 (11%)	1,131 (10%)	674 (6%)	3,896 (34%)	3,867 (34%)	163 (1%)	11,361 (100%)

Document 3

Geographical Incidence of the Principal Indictments Leading to Executions During the Terror								
	Intelligence with the enemy	Hostile Acts Against the State	Conspiracy	Counter- revolutionary Opinions	Refractory Clergy (who refused allegiance to the revolutionary government	Concealment of Refractory Clergy	Corruption	Total
Paris	292	114	676	988	29	5	100	2,204
Frontier Departments	139	28	5	231	72	3	3	481
Troubled Departments	25	10,291	19	57	162	20	1	10,575
All of France	457	10,456	703	1,302	293	32	104	13,347

Document 4

Charles James Fox, reformist member of Parliament and sympathizer with the French Revolution, in a speech to Parliament, November 7, 1793

“What a pity that a people [the French] capable of such Incredible energy, should be guilty or rather be governed by those who are guilty of such unheard of crimes and cruelties.”

Document 5

A letter from General Ronsin, a leader of the Revolutionary Army that subdued Lyon. December 17, 1793

“The guillotine and the firing squad did justice to more than four hundred rebels. But a new revolutionary commission has just been established, and in a few days the grape shot, fired by our cannoneers will have delivered to us, in one single moment, more than four thousand conspirators.... The Republic has need of a great example... whilst the thunderbolt, which must exterminate them in an instant, will carry terror into the departments where the seed of rebellion was sown, it is necessary that the flames from their devastated dens proclaim far and wide the punishment that is destined for those who try to imitate them.”

Document 6

Camille Desmoulins, journalist and former ally of Robespierre, in *le Vieux Cordelier*, December 20, 1793

“You want to remove all your enemies by means of the guillotine? Has there ever been such great folly? Could you make a single man perish on the scaffold without making ten enemies for yourself from his family or his friends? Do you believe that these women, these old men, these weaklings, those egoists, these stragglers of the Revolution, whom you imprison, are really dangerous? Of your enemies there remain among you only the cowardly and the sick. The strong and the brave have emigrated. They have perished at Lyon or in the Vendée; the remainder (consisting of some renters and shopkeepers] do not merit your wrath.”

Document 7

Maximilien de Robespierre, in a speech to the National Convention, December 25, 1793

“Revolution is the war waged by liberty against its enemies; a constitution is that which crowns the edifice of freedom once victory has been won and the nation is at peace. The revolutionary government has to summon extraordinary activity to its aid precisely because it is at war. It is subjected to less binding and less uniform regulations...because it is compelled to deploy, swiftly and incessantly, new resources to meet new and pressing dangers. Under a constitutional government little more is required than to protect the individual against abuses by the state, whereas revolutionary government is obliged to defend the state itself against the factions that assail it from every quarter. To good citizens revolutionary government owes the full protection of the state; to the enemies of the people it owes only death....It must adopt the general principles of ordinary government whenever these can be rigorously applied without endangering public liberty. Its force to repress must be commensurate with the audacity or treachery of those who conspire against it....”

Document 8

William Pitt, British Prime Minister, in a speech to Parliament, January 21, 1794

“But it has been urged, that the French have distinguished themselves in the field; nor will it be denied that, independently of any other circumstance, the spirit of a people called forth by the impulse which acts so strongly in such a situation, may have the effect to make them brave in the moment of action. But their efforts are merely the result of a system of restraint and oppression, the most terrible and gigantic, that has, perhaps, ever existed. They are compelled into the field by the terror of the guillotine – they are supported there only by those resources which their desperate situation affords; and, in these circumstances, what can be the dependence on the steadiness of their operations, or what rational prospect can there be of the permanence of their exertions?”

Document 9

Reports to the government on public opinion, January 28, 1794

“The majority of the citizens agreed in unanimously [sic] saying that the tribunals act well, that they acquit the innocent and punish the guilty, although murmurs are heard among the public at their judgments.”

Document 10

Reports to the government on public opinion, February 23, 1794

“Bitter complaints already expressed numberless times, were repeated today of the arrest and imprisonment of citizens who are good patriots and are victims of ambition, cupidity, jealousy, and, in short, every human passion.”

Document 11

Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, in a speech to the National Convention, February 26, 1794

“Citizens, how could anyone delude himself that you are inhuman?...Since the month of May last, our history is a lesson about the terrible extremities to which indulgence leads. In that period....Custine had abandoned Mainz, the Palatinate, and the banks of the Rhine; Calvados was in revolt; the Vendée was victorious, Lyon, Bordeaux, Marseille, and Toulon were in arms against the French people; our armies were being beaten in the Pyrenees and around Mont Blanc, you were being betrayed by everyone....Yet the greatest of our misfortunes was a certain fear of the concentration of authority necessary to save the state.”

Document 12

Reports to the government on public opinion, March 2, 1794

“On seeing peasants on the scaffold, people said, What, have these wretches allowed themselves to be corrupted? If they were nobles or rich people it would not be strange, their being counter-revolutionists, but in that class we should expect all to be patriots. ‘The law is just,’ people remarked, ‘it strikes rich and poor indiscriminately.’ The verdicts of the Revolutionary Tribunal are always applauded.”

Document 13

Reports to the government on public opinion, March 30, 1794

“The revolutionary committees are every day falling into discredit. You daily hear that they consist of a number of intriguers, who plunder the nation and oppress citizens, It is a fact that there is no section in Paris which is not dissatisfied with its revolutionary committee or does not seriously desire to have them abolished.”

Document 14

A Suspect Appearing Before a Revolutionary Committee



Contemporary French engraving of a revolutionary committee by an unknown artist, probably an opponent of the terror.